Client-Consultant Relationships - An analysis of the client role from the client’s perspective

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Executive summary
Introduction and problem identification

Literature on consulting often takes the perspective of the consultant. As a gap in the literature can be identified what concerns the role of the client in the client-consultant relationship this thesis focuses on the question: how do managers perceive the consultant in their organization?

Methodology
The methodology being used in this thesis is hermeneutics in order to reflect on the informants expressions about how they view and perceive a consultant.

Findings
In general, it can be assumed that clients have a clear understanding of consultants. Both the assumed roles in which they are expected to act for both client and consultant as well as how the nature of the assignment affects their relationship. The client managers were well aware of the fact that the presence of a consultant demanded something from them as clients. Otherwise, the consultant would run amok and invent new projects if the consultant was not told about the background for his employment. In the phase of selecting a consultant, reputation and experience became very important to the client managers. Both in terms of the agency he represented, as well as how they perceived the consultant as a person. Common for all the interviewed managers was that they understood consultants, both positively and negatively. Positively, in the sense that the consultants were seen as experts who could both challenge their understanding and give them an objective, neutral perspective to a certain problem in their organisation. Negatively, when consultants were hired to overtake management responsibilities or when clients experienced a pre-packaged solution. Especially, the selection process of hiring consultants was crucial as the clients would not know the quality of the service they bought. It was also common that clients in general wanted to be in control and keep the consultant on a short leash. Their main responsibility as clients was to make sure that they were not too impressed by the consultant, and made sure that the knowledge provided by the consultant was valuable for the company. Furthermore it was important for clients to keep an inside perspective and still reflect on how the recommendations by consultants would affect their own business and moreover their own perception of their challenges.
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1 Introduction

The relationship is much more than a personal relationship even though it is often argued that the relationship between clients and consultants is based on people. (Czerniawska 2007:53). In order to make the consultancy intervention work and be successful it is therefore crucial for managers to understand the nature and context of this relationship.

From an intercultural point of view the relationship between client and consultant is a relationship where two parties each belong to different cultures. In current literature the most perspective is the outsider versus insider perspective. With “expert organisational outsiders” who bring outsider knowledge to “organisational insiders”. (Sturdy et al. 2009: introduction)

In the current literature, several models and perspectives exists on how and why consultants and client should work together, and each of them assigns different roles to each type of client and consultant alike. However, in this current literature there is also a tendency to look at how the consultant plays an active role in building the relationship, whereas the client is often left out and often considered a passive part.

Authors Andreas Werr and Håkan Linnarsson (Werr & Linnarsson 2002) have in their field research focused on how clients attempt to manage the client-consultant relationship. Their research reveals that managers tend to have ambiguous and often conflicting views on how they use consultants. Often the close collaboration with the client clashes with the clients’ struggle of being in control and the consultants agenda of making him or herself indispensable in the project in order to achieve a continuous buying of the consultancy services and thereby a dependant relationship. For the client manager this double control problem explains their ambiguous relationship. While the dependence and reliance on the consultant may be beneficial for the company, it may also question the managers’ ability to manage and thereby threatening his or hers professionalism.

This thesis will deal with the subject of the relationship between client and consultant from the client’s perspective. As this perspective is often argued to be missing missing from existing literaturethe thesis will try to cast some light on an so far underexplored issue,
namely how the consultant is perceived in the eyes of the client. This had led to the below mentioned thesis question.

1.1 Thesis Question

“How do clients perceive their own role in the client-consultant relationship and how do they perceive the consultant?”

1.2 Research Question

In order to answer the thesis question, the following research questions will be answered. They are not independent questions or entities but should provide the reader with a red line of thought in the thesis. The research questions should therefore make the main argument of the thesis more visible.

1) How do the informants in this study view their role as clients?
2) What is the informants’ view on the consultant’s role in their relationship?
3) What is the informants’ view on the consultant’s role in their relationship?

2 Methodology

The thesis consists of two parts. First, is a literature review on client-consultant relations, which consists of a review on the issues and discussions, methods and theories which are evident in the literature on client-consultant relations. These will mostly focus on the role the client is supposed to play.

Second is a qualitative study on four manager’s perception of consultants where the two research questions will be answered. These managers have all used consultants in their professional lives and have been interviewed to give their view on consultants.

In the following section the main methodology for the thesis will be described. The choice of methodology will furthermore be reflected upon in the section 3.2 Theoretical considerations.

2.1 Hermeneutics

The perspective on the research methodology is hermeneutics. The core of hermeneutics is to interpret on something which makes sense to the observer. In short it means
“interpretation” and central to hermeneutics is the interpretation of text, dialogue and conversation, as well as the social acts and praxis. (Højbjerg 2004: 311).

This thesis is written within the hermeneutical tradition. According to the philosophical, hermeneutic it is not possible to interpret upon a text independently of the researchers scheme of things on which he or her relates, interprets and understands. In this regard, I cannot relate to the interviews without acknowledging the fact that I possess some kind of preunderstanding. In this case, this is understood as the theories and standpoints I have observed throughout the literature I have read. This understanding consists according to Højbjerg of both a preunderstanding as well as prejudice.

This is the reason why the researcher or interpreters plays an active part in this process of interpreting. (Højberg 2004: 313). It is in the meeting between the researcher/observer and the object being observed that the meaning is created. (Højbjerg 2004: 314).

The choice of the way I pursuit to see the world naturally affects the methodology as well as how I proceed through the analysis. In this thesis, goal is to analyse and interpret on the client managers’ perception and interpretation of consultants with whom they have collaborated.

The research question is examined from a hermeneutic point of view, which means that the observer has the role to interpret and relate critical to the theoretical text being used as well as the empirical material. My role as a researcher in the hermeneutic tradition is to interpret on the empirical works, but in line with the philosophical tradition of hermeneutics, this cannot happen without any form of preunderstanding. This preunderstanding form and shape the choice and selection of theory, the interview situation as well as the analysis of the transcribed interviews. (Højbjerg 2004: 322)

The hermeneutic circle describes the process in which a text is understood in a hermeneutic tradition. According to the principle the individual part of a text can only be understood if context is involved and context can only be understood by making a reference to the individual parts. (Højbjerg 2004: 312). The hermeneutic circle therefore describes the alternation between the “whole” as well as the individual parts. (Ibid.). It is furthermore
important to mention that the boundary between what is set as the whole and the individual parts is not rigid. (Ibid.).

3 Methodological considerations

3.1 Empirical considerations

Naturally, the relationship is twofold but as the current research on consulting relationship to some degree leave out the client part in relationship, I found it natural to explore the client part. The missing client perspective is therefore the object for my analysis. That being said it has not been possible to interview the consultant part because the access was restricted. It would naturally have strengthened the validity of this thesis. Despite this fact I still believe that the interview can be used to describe the relationship from the client’s point of view.

Furthermore, it has not been possible to observe the interaction between client and consultant as it takes place (in situ) but through interviews with managers, it has been possible to construct an image of how they have perceived the management consultant in retro perspective. As it was not possible to observe the interaction in situ I had to settle for the clients own interpretation of their experiences in a retro perspective. Combined with the recommendations and interpretations made by other authors on this relationship, I still believe the thesis can cast some light on a so far little unexplored issue, namely how the client perceives the consultant.

I try to seek an understanding of the whole and interpret on what the informants have told me. It is the interview as a whole, which I interpret on, and not only the single quotes being used in the analysis. By this interpreting, I am actively using the hermeneutic circle because according to the hermeneutic tradition it is not possible to interpret upon the single part, without looking at it as a whole which should be seen as the interview. The hermeneutic tradition does not seek to uncover a final truth, but seeks to achieve superior concordance without any disturbing inner contradictions. On the background of the sparse data material, combined with the qualitative approach it is therefore not the goal to achieve a final truth in a positivistic sense. Generalisations are therefore not possible to achieve.
As the interviews have been semi-structured this has also given me the opportunity to ask deeper to subjects and areas, which both the object of analysis and me as a researcher finds interesting. In accordance with hermeneutics I am also well aware of the fact that my interpretation of the interviews is only one of many plausible explanations. The thesis therefore seeks to cover how the client acts and why.

3.2 Theoretical considerations

In this thesis several theories on the relationship between client and consultants have been used. This has been done in order to steer my collection of data as well as provide me with an idea about is important for researchers who previous have been doing research on the subject “the relationship between clients and consultants”.

The type of consultants is furthermore analysed using a broad definition, as it is not only management consultant the interviewed managers have had experience in collaborating with but also other types as well. This ranges from the use of Six Sigma consultants, change and strategy consultants as well as IT-consultants.

Each of the theories on the relationship between client and consultant as presented in this thesis, is based on different assumptions on how knowledge is transferred between the client and the consultant. They each assume a different reason to why consultants are hired as well as what role the client is supposed to play. Furthermore, each of the models (as defined by Nikolova 2007) has different opinions about the value of consultancy. The expert model for example assumes that the consultant is an expert with the best of intentions and that the client will always be able to benefit from its value. The critical model contrary questions this value and some authors argue that clients should abstain from hiring consultants. This is for example evident in the literature written by journalists and critical observers like Bloch. (Bloch 1999)

4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis will consist of 3 parts: The first part is where the subject of client-consultant relations is introduced to the reader. It will focus on the client role in the relationship with the consultant and what kind of relation it is recommended, according to the literature to
have with the consultant. As it turns out this relation is highly dependent on the type of problem and assignment for which the consultant is hired.

The second part is a literature review, which focuses on the different models or types of relationship between the client and the consultant. The section should inform the reader about the issues and models introduced by other researchers in the relationship between clients and consultants. There it becomes clear that the way the client manages and perceives this relationship is still unexplored in current research. Furthermore, the literature review should provide the reader with the context of the relationship between client and consultant and gives the reader an idea how researchers have explored and theorised upon the relationship by exploring the dissemination of knowledge between the two parts. In this thesis I use a literature review to describe the different discussions in current literature concerning the client-consultant relationship. This section is used to provide the reader with the context of the thesis. The conclusions and recommendations in the research done by others is then the foundation and provided the critical questions in my interviews. Emphasis here is on the client role in the relationship.

Third part is based on qualitative interviews with client managers about their perception of consultants. It builds on interviews with different CEO’s on their pre understanding of consultants according to hermeneutics. It focuses on how the interviewed managers perceive their role as clients and how they perceive the consultant they have had brought in to help them in their organisation. It also focuses on the type of relation, and how the client manager feels affected by the presence of the consultant in his/her organization.

5 Data collection

Qualitative research and method of analysis is used in this thesis as a way of collecting and analysing data. As the goal is to interpret upon the interviewed manager’s perceptions and attitudes towards consultants it gives a more profound and multilayered set of data, contrary to a quantitative method of data collection. To illustrate this aspect Denzin and Lincoln has a definition of qualitative research, which says:

“Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices
transform the world. They turn the world in to a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. [...] qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 3).

To transfer this definition to my role as a researcher, the task of the researcher is to interpret and make sense of representations found in the interviews and to make sense of the meanings people bring to it. Furthermore the purpose of the qualitative interview according to Kvale is that the informant share his or hers attitudes towards the object of the study with the interviewer. (Kvale 2000:78)

The explorative method of doing research according to Kvale (Kvale 1997: 97) is furthermore used in this thesis. According to Kvale an exploratory study is a study where the researcher is asking more deeply to subject, if the researcher sees some resemblance to known theory and literature (Kvale 1997: 97). The way I used the exploratory study was as I through the literature review had become familiar with the theories and studies on client-consultant relationship. I used this approach to interviewing, as I wanted the interviewees own point of view on the case and how they perceived the consultants (Kvale 1997). Furthermore, I used a semi structured interview guide where I with the experience done in my literature review was able to let the interviewee talk about their experiences with consultants as long as I found it to be important, considering the knowledge I had obtained in the literature review. I wanted the interviewee to give his own examples and his own experiences and foremost the interviewees own interpretation. I was listening to the stories they could tell and during the interview, I tried to make them explain more. That being said I was also very careful about not noticing for the subject what the theory said and had told me. It is important to mention that many of the studies referred to in the literature review are empirical studies based on qualitative studies. The purpose of this study has not been to generalize, but to find “connecting” themes or content themes.

5.1 Selection of the informants

In the process of collecting data, I decided to contact some of the largest consultant companies available to see whether they could refer to their clients. What I did not realize at
the time however was that they are legally not allowed to this, and therefore the answers to my request was all-negative. In general, I found the data collecting process very difficult, as I had to go through the different consultant companies in order to get to the client. These all fell out negatively and it was first when I trough a friend of mine managed to get qualified interview respondents. The friend of mine, a consultant himself, asked one of his client managers whether he would like to participate, which he did.

Furthermore, I was introduced to a network of CEO’s in business development, which my manager at work was a member of as well as some of his colleagues. This meant that I through their network of CEO’s did get access to other managers with huge experience in working with consultants. In the end, however I managed to interview four persons. The sample of my study consists of people who are all managers, two of them were CEO’s and they have all used and worked closely together with consultants. The type of work for which the consultants were hired, were very varied and all informants have been involved in the process of selecting consultants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The informants</th>
<th>Kim Damgaard, male.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peter Lanng Nielsen, male.</td>
<td>In the analysis I will only refer to him by his last name Lanng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the analysis I will only refer to him by his last name Lanng</td>
<td>Works at TDC, customer care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lars Götzsche, male.</td>
<td>Kim Damgaard, male.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the analysis I will only refer to him by his last name Götzsche</td>
<td>Works at Fujitsu Technology Solutions, CEO for infrastructure services in the Nordics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works at Fujitsu Technology Solutions, sales director.</td>
<td>Works at Fujitsu Technology Solutions, CEO for infrastructure services in the Nordics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manager nr. 4, male.</th>
<th>Manager nr. 4, male.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He has asked to be anonymous, both in regards to his name and the name of the company. In the analysis I will therefore only refer to him as Manager nr. 4.</td>
<td>Works as CEO in the banking sector.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2 Interview guide

In this thesis I have chosen to make an interview guide based on the thesis question, the research question and the literature. I have been careful about selecting the right questions in my interview guide and used the recommendations by Kvale on the different types of
questions used in qualitative interviews (Kvale 1997: 137). Therefore all the questions in the interview guide are accurate, short and straightforward with no use of any theoretical terms. The four interviews are not similar in length. This is due to the fact that the interview guide is a way to structure the interview but still allowing the informant and the interviewee to ask follow-up question during the interviews. This is also a way to minimize misunderstandings in the subsequent analysis.

The interview guide consisted of 8 questions. The 8 questions were divided into 5 themes; the clients personal background, the use of consultants, how the consultants were selected, their role as a client and a description of a project. The first question covered the background of the informant. The second and third question dealt with the informants’ use of consultants and their reason to use consultants. The fourth question dealt with how the informants selected the consultants. The fifth question dealt with the informants’ role as a client. The sixth and seventh question covered the informants’ use of a project who had either gone wrong or good or both. The eight question is to be seen as a follow-up question where the informants can comment on the whole interview and issues which arose during the interview.

5.3 Confidentiality and anonymity
The interviewed managers have all been asked about whether the interview was confidential and whether I could use their expressions. They all agreed to that except one. However, in all cases I should keep the names on the consulting companies confidential. Therefore, three of the interviewed managers are identified with names, however names of the consultant companies are disguised and they are only known to the researcher. The final person in my sample, wanted to be anonymous and his identity is therefore confidential. In the analysis he is known as “manager nr. 4”.

5.4 Interpretation of the interviews
Each of the interviews has been recorded and then transcribed in full, but without any remarks on how the interviewee responded, remarks to body language etc. Small changes have been made to make it readable. Subsequently the transcribed interviews have been analyzed according to Kvale and his “(...) an ad hoc election of methods and theories to create meaning for the researcher. (Kvale 1997:201)” Each of the quotes in the transcribed
interviews was taken and marked with a certain code, the transcripts were carefully analysed, and common content themes have been extracted from the interviews. The content themes are used to go above the level of purely referring to what is being said in the interviews according to researcher, but to interpret on the “why” they say it that way. This had led to an identification of general themes; what happens before, during and after their collaboration, their perception of consultants, the use of consultants, how they are influenced by consultants as well as how the consultants act according to the client. I have chosen a theme of analysis if two or more of the informants are reflecting upon the subject and if the subject is contributing to the answering of the thesis question. Each theme of analysis has keywords which should help to guide the analysis and thereby contribute to the main thread throughout the thesis. I have chosen to analyse across the empirical material in order to be able to discuss the different meanings of the informants concerning the different themes of analysis.

The themes are:

- What happens before and during the collaboration takes place?
- Perception of consultants
  - Client advice for other clients
  - Client advice for other consultants
- The use consultants
  - Why hire a consultant as a manager
  - For what purpose
  - What pitfalls to clients experience by using consultants?
- How are managers influenced by consultants?
- How should consultants be managed?
- The role of the consultant
  - Abilities of the consultant
    - Educational sense
  - Trust to the consultant
6 Literature review

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the current literature and current views or aspects on the relationship between client and consultant. It will focus on how client-consultant relations are approached and conceptualized within the different strands of literature on consulting. From the current literature, four models on the relationship between client and consultant will be introduced. The different approaches to the relationship each sets of a frame of expectations to a client role and a consultant role. Each approach defines what is expected of the client and the consultant. Common to these expectations to their role is that it depends on context of their relation, and therefore the different kinds of relationships are included in this thesis. The way they form and shape their relationship depends on the reason for why they are hired. As the client role e.g. expectations to how the client behaves, is still underexplored, an aim of this part of the thesis is to explore this issue grounded in each of the different existing approaches to consultancy, hereof the modes on consultancy. Another important factor of the role of the client is that the client is often thought of as being passive in the relationship with the consultant. This is evident in especially the functionalist literature, which according to Werr and Styhre takes the value of consulting for the client for granted. The critical literature on the other hand questions this value. (Werr & Styhre 2003:46)

7 Historical background on management consulting research

In the past few years, researchers’ academic interest in Management Consulting has grown rapidly as the consulting industry has expanded and its economic impact grew. Especially during the 1980’s and the 1990’s the management consulting industry expanded heavily and was one of the fastest growing sectors in the knowledge economy. In fact almost 80 percent of today’s companies were established in this period (Ernst & Kieser 2002). Alongside management gurus, the business media, and business academics, consultants were seen by many researchers as persons who led to the creation, the dissemination and the transfer of new management ideas (Abrahamson & Fairchild 1999).

The knowledge consultants provided were not just new ideas, but also ideas that had consequence to organizational strategy and thus shaped management practice. Therefore,
management consultancy was seen as both influencer and carrier of new management ideas, strategies and organizational forms between organizations (Kipping 1997).

As the use of consultants grew, particularly the media became suspicious on the power and influence consultants had at the highest levels in the corporation and on strategies. In the business media, consultants often were portrayed as: too expensive; charging too high fees, ineffective; many interventions fail, developing buzzwords they only themselves understand the true meaning of, running amok if not kept in a tight leash by the client and acting in their own interest instead of that of the client (Fincham & Clark 2002: 8). It is this development that according to Fincham and Clark led to a critical strand which the authors define as “Critical Consulting” also mentioned later.

7.1 Academic issues in management consulting research

In this section I will explore upon the 3 different perspectives on management consulting research. The 3 different perspectives are; organizational development (OD), the functionalist perspective and the critical perspective.

7.2 Organizational Development (OD)

Fincham and Clark argues that much of the literature on management consulting developed, during the mid 50’s and onward to the mid 80’s was primarily written from one perspective to change management - Organization Development (OD) (Fincham & Clark 2002: 5). They define OD an approach that “seeks to increase an organisation’s effectiveness through a planned collaborative intervention process, which draws on behavioural science and aims to renew and organization’s problem-solving capacity” (Ibid). This is a definition which according to the authors led to the development of a new approach to consultancy where goal is to analyse problems in the intervention process between client and consultant and to propose solutions. The problem to which a solution was proposed was often highly normative and was often targeted at practitioners (Fincham & Clark 2002). Authors writing from an OD point of view made their focus on how consultants worked and others even how they should work. (Fincham & Clark 2002:6)

7.3 Functionalist perspective

In the functionalist perspective, the relationship between client and the consultant is portrayed as a contractual, arm’s-length and temporary relationship where the goal is to
provide the client with a service of knowledge. It is assumed that the consultant is independent from the client, which makes the consultant able to objectively view organizational problems and to remain separate to internal power struggles, hidden agendas etc. (Ernst, Berit and Kieser, Alfred (2002); Kubr 1996; Kyrö 1995). Moreover, a main characteristic is the fact that the relationship is clearly defined when it comes to content, terms and duration. In the functionalist perspective, the client-consultant relationship is uncritically seen as a helping relationship, which is contractual and time-limited and with a defined task to solve. Central to the functionalist perspective is that the client is in control and the consultant is dependent on the client. The reason for this is the fact that the client has the ability to hire and fire the consultant. Given the consultants’ objective of a continuous buying of services, this places the consultant in a subordinated position to the client (Maister 1993). Therefore, trust is presented as an important success factor in the relationship. Some ambivalence however exists in this relationship as the functionalist perspective builds on the underlying assumption that the consultant has superior knowledge compared to the client and therefore the contractual power of the client shifts (Werr & Styhre 2003).

### 7.4 Critical perspective

The critical strand in the literature focuses on the strategies and techniques that consultants use in order to convince clients on the quality of their services. In the critical literature, the issue in question is therefore how consultants convince their clients and demonstrate their knowledge to them. Compared to OD the critical view does not automatically assume that consultants have the role of professional helpers. (Fincham & Clark 2002: 6). The fact that consultants were always acting in the best interest of the client and the value they can provide for the client was mainly questioned. Mainly, this question was answered by looking on the nature of consulting advice and strategies as well as the power of persuasion (Fincham & Clark 2002). Management consultants were seen as outsiders who used impressions or theatrical skills to convince clients on the value of their services. Therefore, especially the rhetorical skills and the knowledge they provided became of great interest in the critical literature (Kipping & Engwall 2003).

Compared to the functionalist perspective the critical perspective shifts the power distribution toward the consultant. In this perspective the consultant is viewed as the
controlling part in the relationship and focus is on the client as a victim to the consultant’s rhetorical skills. According to the critical perspective, managers have two parallel challenges in their working lives. The first is controlling the organization and the second is managing their own identity as managers (Watson 2001). Techniques of the consultant therefore play a central role in such a way it is possible to control, change, improve, and at the same time reinforce a positive managerial identity (Clark & Salaman 1996; 1998). In the critical perspective, it is argued that consultants try to reproduce the image of management as powerful, important and being in control. The client is therefore argued to be in the hands of the management consultants, who define and set up the roles and context in which the client managers are to act as well as the role they have to enact (Werr and Styhre 2003). Authors (Clark, Fincham, Sturdy) supporting the critical view claim that the consultants are inclined to use impression management due to the absence of a distinctive body of knowledge, as claimed by supporters of the critical view. (Clark 1995: 90). Consultant’s skills therefore lie in presenting themselves as experts in order to convince clients of the service they provide.

8 Roles in the client-consultant relationship

Much of the current literature on the relations between client and consultant make use of applying different roles and metaphors to describe what is going on in the relationship. The most of the roles however can be applied to how consultants are expected to act, whereas the client has an expected passive role and therefore considered more as a constant in the equation that sums up their relationship.

8.1 Roles of the consultant

One of the first authors to propose a classification of the roles taken by consultants was Tilles. He saw three different roles applied to the consultant: “seller of services”, “supplier of information” and “business doctor dispensing cures” (Tilles 1961 cited in Clark 1995: 88). The first describes the consultant as a person involved in a traditional sales-purchase transaction. Second describes the role as the person who supports the flow of information between the two parties and third in terms of the consultant as a business doctor with the cure for the ill patient. Steele identified nine different roles that a consultant may adopt within the client organization in his interaction with the client: teacher, student, detective, barbarian, clock,
monitor, talisman, advocate and ritual pig (Steele 1975 cited in Clark 1995:88). In general, their role is seen as that of a professional helper or a doctor with a cure for the illnesses in the organization (Clark 1995: 89). Reasons to this according to Clark were mainly due to the fact that many of the writers in management consulting where successful consultants themselves (Clark 1995:89). The consultancy roles they seek are therefore a reflection of their own understanding of what role the consultant should adopt, in order to achieve a successful relationship with the client.

Another author who has explored the concept of roles among consultants is Fincham (Fincham 1999) He attempts to contribute to this debate and has explored the role of the consultants in a situation of change. According to him, the consulting process contains no structures or roles (like the dependent client and indispensable consultant or the resistant client and vulnerable consultant), instead the consultant-client relationship is best regarded as: “part of an overarching managerial structure and a contingent exchange that assumes a variety of forms” (Fincham 1999: 335).

8.2 Roles of the client

According to Clark, one the greatest problems the client experiences is that of being able to select and identify the consultant which fits their needs. As consultancy services are not cheap and impossible to rectify, their selection of the consultant is therefore even more crucial. Clark argues that the problem is further complicated as managers tend to focus on the here-and-now problems, rather than looking at the problems which focus on the long-term future of the company. (Clark 1995:10). However the root of the problem in selecting the right consultant is connected to the fact that consultancy services are to some degree intangible products.

First problem is that it is difficult for clients to determine exactly what is being offered and how it compares to other consultancies. (Clark 1995:11). Second, it is if difficult to determine whether the consultant did a good job. Which, as Clark also points out is something the client is looking for in order to be able to create an image of the consultant, which can help the client to select consultants in the future. (Clark 1995: 11)

This information is often given by assuring the client that the consultant understands and can relate to the problem, but also that the consultant has experience in solving these kinds
of problems. Or by referring to the biographies of the consultants in order to create an image of good quality to the client. However, this selection process is as previously mentioned complicated due to the nature of consultancy services. As consultancy services are intangible products it is difficult to prepurchase a guaranteed level of service. (Clark 1995: 12). The service furthermore necessitates an interaction between the supplier and the customer and it is therefore in the interaction between the client and the consultant that the production takes place. However, as not two customers are similar nor their needs, this illustrates a third feature of the nature of services, namely the difficulty in delivering a standardized service (Clark 1995: 13). A feature, which furthermore complicates clients’ ability to compare the services being offered. Secondly, services are consumed where it is delivered, meaning it is in the interaction between client and consultant that the final result is created. This furthermore also complicates the ability for the client to receive the same service as others have before. As a result to these characteristics the client also has problems in evaluating the level of service being offered.

Furthermore as Clark points out is the selecting and evaluation of consultancy services worsened by some of the structural characteristics of management consulting. Foremost the fact that there are no effective barriers of entry in the business. Anyone can call themselves consultants. (Clark 1995: 14) For clients this according to Clark has four consequences:

First, that the number of consultancies they can choose from is high, which makes the task of differentiating between them even more difficult. Second that the ease of entry in the business, makes it possible for all types of organizations to offer consultancy services. Third, as no industry quality threshold exist, which the consultancy companies have to overcome, it makes it up to the client to determine the quality. Fourth, consultancies are dominated by small companies and generally experience short lives. Consequently the client has many companies to choose from and due to their short life span, it is difficult for clients to develop long term relationships. (Clark 1995: 15)

### 8.3 The Dramaturgical Metaphor

Especially, the dramaturgical metaphor can according to Clark be used to describe the root of consulting, namely impression management. With its focus on the client-consultant...
interactions it help us to achieve an understanding of “what happens when client and consultant interact and work together” (Clark 1995: 109). According to Clark and others (Clark, 1995; Salaman 1996) the work of consultants can best be understood in terms of a dramaturgical metaphor. He argues that consultants seek to “create and sustain a reality that persuades clients of their value in the same way that actors seek to create a theatrical reality” (Clark & Salaman 1998: 25). The interaction between the client and the consultant can be explained by tying the principles known from the theatre to it: action, setting, scripts etc. This metaphor of the theatre highlights what happens when the client and consultant interact and its main strength lies in the fact that it focuses on how consultants attempt to create and manage meaning within the client-consultant relationship. (Clark 1995: 99) It explains how consultants seek to create and impress a reality of comfort to the client and how they try to manipulate this meaning in order to convey an impression of quality to the clients. According to Clark the client is a victim to the consultants. He argues that because of the characteristics of services, the client has a number of dilemmas due to the features of service: Intangibility, Heterogeneity and Perishability. (Clark 1995: 44). These features of service all have implications according to Clark, which are summarised below: (Clark 1995: 56)

Intangibility: The quality of what the client buys is difficult to determine both before and after consumption has taken place. Interaction: The final result is dependent on the quality of interaction between the client and consultant. Especially the experience of the interaction informs the client and forms his expectations of his pre and post purchase evaluation in terms of quality. Furthermore, according to Clark, this makes clients to emphasize the quality of the first interaction in the prepurchase phase over other criteria’s. As a result to this, clients are more likely to emphasize their previous experience with a particular consultant or consultants in general (Clark 1995: 61) which is also why Clark mentions reputation as an important factor for the client when they choose the consultancy. (Clark 1995: 74).

Heterogeneity: As service is difficult to standardize, the quality becomes a variable to the client.
Perishability: As the service perishes at the moment it is consumed, for the client this makes it impossible to purchase the same service.

Clark also draws on Schein’s model of consultancy to describe the different models on consulting the purchase of expertise model, the doctor-patient model as well as the process consultation model (Schein 1969)

The purchase of expertise model: Here the model is that the client has identified what is wrong, whereas the consultant must deliver this service. According to Clark this is a model where the consultancies act as task-interactive organizations. (Clark 1995: 47).

The doctor-patient model – in which the patient; the client is not sure what is wrong. Therefore the consultant is diagnosing and has to decide what is right and wrong and then to prescribe a solution to the identified problem.

Process Consultation. A model, where the both the client and the consultant work jointly together, both in diagnosing and in the development which should lead to a solution. The main problem is that clients do not know what they have bought before they get it. (Clark 1995: 64) “Hence, clients are likely to lace considerable stress on the quality of the interaction process when selecting between alternative consultancies. This means that clients will tend to emphasize evaluations of previous interactions, based on prior experience, when choosing a consultancy. Therefore, if consultants are to persuade clients of the quality, and convince them of their value, they must actively manage and manipulate the interaction process in order to create favourable impressions of their service. (Ibid.)

Clark uses the dramaturgical metaphor to describe how the clients evaluate consultants in terms of quality in order to answer what the clients selection criteria is based on. He argues that “The main strength of this metaphor is that is emphasizes the nature of client-consultant interaction and draws attention to the fact that, and the ways in which, this is manipulated by the consultants in order to convey an impression of value and quality to clients”. (Clark 1995: 87). Furthermore Clark argues that:

“consultants seek to create and sustain a reality that persuades clients of their value in the same way that actors seek to create a theatrical reality. Therefore the principles of theatre – actions, setting, scripts, etc. – undergird the way in which consultants seeks to manage their
relationships with clients and the way in which we come to comprehend this” (Clark 1995: 87). On a general level the dramaturgical metaphor is drawn from the work of Burke, who argue that any account of social behavior can be explained by tying the theatrical principles to it. Act; what has done, Scene; when or where is was done, Agent; who did it, agency; how he did it and purpose; why was it done. (Burke 1994 cited in Clark 1995: 98)

9 The relationship between clients and consultants

The client-consultant relationship is a broad term, which can describe the client in its widest sense of the term – an organisation that employs the services of the consulting firm. However, the term client can also be used in a narrower form, which means the people or individual who collaborates closely with the consultant, discusses the assignment with him or her, receive the reports written by the consultant or the client who recommends the services of the consultants to higher management advisors in the client organisation. (Kubr 2002: 64). Furthermore as Kubr argues is the relationship always personalized on a one-to-one basis. Even though a formal contract exists between the two organizations, the service is still delivered through direct contact between the two parts and will as a result hereof depend on “the abilities and attitudes of the individuals directly involved, and on the psychological contract between them.” (Kubr 2002: 65). It is therefore recommended for consultants to determine primarily who the real client is.

In this thesis, the client defined on broad basis, however in the analysis I regard the client as the manager who decides to bring in the consultant. It therefore uses the same definition of the client as the one proposed by Schein. (Schein 1997) Schein points out that any helping or change process always has a client, although the question of the client can be ambiguous and sometimes the dynamics around the client can be problematic. (Ibid.) He therefore proposes a simplifying model to understand the different types of clients as well as the types of client relationships. According to Schein six basic types can be defined (Ibid):

**Contact clients.** The individual(s) who first approach the consultant with an issue, problem or request

**Intermediate clients.** The individual(s) or groups who will get involved in the project in meetings, interviews or other activities as the project evolves.
**Primary clients.** The clients who own the problem or the issue the consultant works on. These are often the same individuals who pay the consulting fees or whose budget covers the consultancy expense.

**Unwitting clients.** Members of the client organization, both above and below in the organizational hierarchy who are related to the primary clients. They are also members who are not aware they will be affected by the intervention.

**Indirect clients.** Members of the organization who are aware they will be affected by the interventions. They are however unknown to the consultant and may feel either positive or negative about the effects of this consultant-intervention.

**Ultimate clients.** The community or the whole organization that the consultant cares about. Their welfare in the organization must be considered in any intervention the consultant initiates. The typology however is not straightforward as different clients may have different needs, expectations, influence and different degree of participation in the consultancy process. As seen above the fact that many types of clients exists makes the relationship client-consultant relationship even more complicated in the sense that it becomes difficult for the consultant to know who he/she should work on.

Therefore, Schein finds it important that the consultant always keeps in mind who the client really is in order to achieve more successful relationships.

Kubr also argues that for a successful client-consultant relationship to function there needs to be a close collaboration; however, the consultant should not be mistaken that this close collaboration is perceived the same by every client. Some clients might think that by collaborating they are actually doing the consultant’s job and may even refuse to give the consultant the information that is needed. Due to previous mentioned reasons in modern consulting a strong collaboration between client and consultant is needed according to Kubr (Kubr 2002: 67)

Much of the traditional theory on consulting is developed with practitioners in mind and often with a very pragmatic approach to managers. The relationship between client and consultant is understood as follows: “the client is the purchaser of consulting services, the consultant is the provider, and the client-consultant relationship facilitates the conduct of the
The scoping of the assignment, the planning and conduct of the intervention and the achievement of the required outcomes are implicitly driven by objective technical considerations and largely divorced from the consultant-client relationship” (Pellegrinelli 2002: 344).

9.1.1 The client role

As previously mentioned prior research on the client-consultant relationship has focused mostly on consultants, their roles and the legitimacy of their knowledge. The client however, is often absent from the client consultant relationship and few times in the literature have studies focused on the client. Fullerton and West even argues that the role of the client has been underemphasized in the success of a relationship (Fullerton and West 1996).

Frida Pemer and Andreas Werr have in their study carried out an analysis on manager’s conceptions of clients. Based on a study of 10 interviews with managers in two companies and how they perceived the management consultant, they found out that four different types of buyers could be identified. The disappointed buyer, the trustful buyer, the strong buyer and the instrumental buyer (Pemer and Werr 2005). Their study focused on how what roles managers had in client-consultant relationship and how the managers being interviewed saw consultants should be managed. Each of the different types of buyers identified in the study assumes different roles and images to the client managers. The background for this are the questions: how consultants were used in their organisation, what they believed consultants could contribute with, eventual risk or challenges they saw when dealing with consultants, how they viewed their role as buyers of consultancy services and what they saw as an ideal use of consultants (Pemer & Werr 2005). According to Pemer & Werr the way consultants and clients forms their relationship, how consultants are used, is a result of how managers perceive their role in the relationship as buyers and users of consultancy services. The reason to why clients buy consulting services is linked to the previous mentioned, different models of consultation according to Schein; namely purchase of expertise, doctor-patient and process consultation (Schein 1988).

Accordingly, three images of the client exist in the literature; the customer, the client and the victim. Even though that the term customer is not directly used in the literature according to Pemer and Werr they see the importance of distinguishing between the term
customer and the term client (Pemer & Werr 2005). The reason to this is that the connotation to the words is different. The “customer” is in control of the relationship with the ability to hire and fire the consultant. Given that the consultant needs repeat business, it also makes the consultant dependent on the client. However the connotation to a “client” is, according to Oxford English Dictionary: “someone who is under the protection or patronage of another, a dependant” (Oxford English Dictionary). The “customer image” on the other hand is an image of a buyer who buys a well-defined service of a consultant who is viewed as an advisor. (Pemer & Werr 2005: 4) The type of relationship they have is temporary and described as arms-length, as the client posses the power of control as he can hire or fire the consultant. The client image on the other hand depicts a client who in need of a service and support from a consultant as the client is in a situation where s/he has trouble in his/her job. Fact is that the client does not know the problem. The consultant is therefore a helper, who possesses the skills to solve the client’s problems due to his expertise and superior skills. Their relationship is very close and trustful, as the clients have put their faith into the hands of the consultant. Consequently, the consultant is also the party in control. Thirdly, the victim buyer is a naïve client dependent by consultants as the person is feeling pressure in his/her role as a manager (see also Watson 1994). (Pemer & Werr 2005: 5) The consultant is a skilled manipulator and their relationship to the client is very close. The view presented here comes from the critical strand of the literature. Their whole study identified four different kinds of buyers of consulting services and thus indicates that managers relate to management consultant in many different ways. The four kinds of buyers are: the disappointed buyer, the trustful buyer, the strong buyer and the instrumental buyer. They conclude that important issues in the management literature, which is how knowledge is transferred, which also is discussed in Nikolova (Nikolova 2007) and the learning in consulting, did not receive much attention among the managers studied (Pemer & Werr 2005:19). What this tells us is the way the relationship is formed is dependent on the type of assignment and the nature of the problem as a whole.

Schwarz and Clark have also investigated how clients respond to consultants recommendations. They have in their study focused on clients different moves in managing the client-consultant Relationship. (Schwarz & Clark 2007) Their study makes an interesting contribution to how clients respond when consultants present their recommendations to
them. Drawing on Pentland (1992) and Goffman (1981) notions of moves, their research showed what kinds of client’s moves that constituted the consultancy-client relationship. How these moves were used by clients to manage the relationship with the consultants and how these moves related to the various levels in the consultant-client relationship. (Schwarz & Clark 2007: 8) According to researchers Schwarz and Clark, the research into client-consultancy relationships has been dominated by a discussion on client and consultants as insiders and outsiders (Schwarz & Clark 2007: 2)). Especially the issue of transferring knowledge from consultant to client is of great importance here. They argue that the relationships clients have, are built up on interaction and that consultants do not face only one client, but several in the same organization. In order to develop a successful relationship, the consultant therefore needs to have a great knowledge about the reasons for client’s moves (moves when presented to consultants’ recommendations) as well as the hierarchy in the client company they argue (Ibid.). These moves are furthermore important as without, they would not question the consultant’s recommendations, and the client would have been portrayed as a passive victim. (Schwarz & Clark 2007: 23)

9.2 Critique to consultancy

The critique to consultancy is manifold and mostly concentrates on the value of consultancy. Bloch for example is one of the harshest critics to consultancy. According to Bloch the consultancy industry is an industry that produces “nothing more than good advice, which often is not good either” (Bloch 1999). Consultants are persons with skills in making good impressions, however their expertise not always makes justice to the advice they give. To hide these shortcomings in their knowledge they make use of buzzwords and use a certain language to talk and create meaning about consultancy; Consultobabble1. He argues that consultants are often superfluous, as long management know what is wants and is competent. This started a series of answers from Russell Williams (Williams 2001) He argued that consultants do engage in impression management, but the stories they tell come from a “complex interdependent client-consultant relationship”. This is a relationship where both parties “define and feed each other’s needs and identities”. (Williams 2001:134)

1 Consultobabble is a language which is equivalent to psychobabble (defined as the language used by psychologist when talking about a person). As selling is important to consultants they provide a mix of language and buzzwords created to impress clients. Bloch (Bloch 1999) therefore argues that clients are victims of consultants consultobabble designed to impress and lure them.
Furthermore, he disagrees with Bloch and argues that the symbolic role consultants play means that the consultants may be “manipulated” by clients. The relationship is therefore not a one-way relationship but the client plays an important role too. He therefore argues that a better understanding of what is going on may help both parts to better manage the relationship and make informed decisions. The relation between consultant and client has furthermore set the context for further research on consultancy advice, but earlier accounts has been criticised for being too one-dimensional in its treatment of the relation between consultant and client (Clark & Salaman 1996). Sturdy supports this criticism and argues that: “the preoccupation with managerial dependency ignores the interactive nature of the process and the extent to which the popular ideas of consultants are taken on and applied by managers” (Sturdy 1997:393).

It is also much debated in existing literature why managers increasingly turn to consultants in their look for management advice. Existing literature emphasises managerial anxiety and therefore – belatedly - a persistent use of consultants. This general view is critically developed in Sturdy’s study where he examines the practices and perceptions of Management consultants and their clients (Sturdy 1997). Managerial anxiety is argued to be the reason for a persistent use of consultants but it often denies the power relations in the organization and portrays management as a passive “victim” of confident consultants. The emphasis however on manager’s insecurity and vulnerability, according to Sturdy, tends to leave out the interactive processes of consulting, where the client is an active part of the process. Managers are often critical and resist consulting advice and consultants try to respond to the insecurity of the client. Sturdy however questions the power and influence, which consultants have, and argues that consultants are also subject to forces of pressure. Both the pressure to perform from the client but also from the consulting firm they represent as well as from their colleagues (Sturdy 1997). As an answer to this Sturdy proposes an alternative model, which explores the client criticism, resistance to pressures and anxieties of consultancy work (Sturdy 1997). This model emphasizes a conventional psychodynamic view, which is seen to further client insecurity. He argues that managers are often portrayed in ethnographic studies as uncertain or insecure. Client insecurity and managers’ anxiety is furthermore reflected in their need of managing/controlling the organization according to Sturdy.
“Clients may be insecure about their job tasks of co-ordination and controlling the unpredictable – market environment, organization and/or employees. This may be intensified or linked to insecurities over their personal career, functional or departmental power, and even the status/legitimacy of the UK managerial profession” (Huczynski 1993b; Jackall 1988 cited in Sturdy 1997).

The consultants’ approaches to a solution are however constrained by clients’ political agendas and tradition. It therefore hinders consultants of presenting rational and objective solutions to the problem. Sturdy therefore proposes a model based on reciprocal anxiety. This model show how consultancy becomes popular, as it reassures the management in company and soften managers’ anxieties, even though it still reinforces and creates their anxieties or insecurity. (Sturdy 1997: 397). Furthermore, as Sturdy argues: “Recognition of the potential threat to managers posed by consultants’ solutions highlights the need to account for management resistance and apparently self-interested action, rather than portraying them as simply either vulnerable and insecure or agents of capital.” (Sturdy 1997: 394) Sturdy’s argument is that client interest in new approaches to management fuels the demand in the consultancy industry of this service. Consultants’ sense of being in control and assume an identity of “technical political experts” reinforces the concern of the client to secure a sense of control over the environment. Both parts therefore struggle to be in control (Sturdy 1997: 394). Clients’ sense of being in control is furthermore challenging consultants’ solutions in line with client criticism of and resistance of consultancy. Consultants’ responses to this such as developing new styles and solutions may further counter criticism and renew managerial anxiety. (Ibid)

The Client-Consultant relationship according to Nikolova

Natalia Nikolova has in her PhD thesis on client-consultant relationships introduced an analytical tool that sheds light on two interrelated issues: the cultural relations between clients and professional service providers (consultants) and their political dimension to consulting. The cultural relations are in this regard mainly concerned with the transfer and creation of knowledge, whereas the political relations look at how power influences the transfer and creation of knowledge (Nikolova 2007: 7).
According to Nikolova three different models (expert, reflective practitioner and Critical model) on the relationship between clients and consultants exists. Whereas, a fourth model (Interpretive model) is developed in her PhD to compensate for the shortcomings in the previous three models. Her interpretive model on the client – consultant interaction gives a suggestion to both clients and consultants on how to improve their interaction. Her work is mainly theoretically deduced rather than empirically induced, but still makes an interesting contribution to the discussion as it focuses on the existing literature and how the different roles, needs, behaviours of the client is a key factor in clients-consultants working together (Ibid). As this is also a part of how they form their different expectations and explains how this influences their relationship it makes an interesting contribution to this thesis.

The purpose of Nikolova’s study is to do a study on the nature, characteristics and the success factors of the client-consultant relationship, with an emphasis on the creation and transfer of knowledge in the problem-solving process between clients and consultants (Nikolova 2007: 8). Nikolova also emphasises the fact that to achieve success, clients and consultants have to be aware of the “human, cultural, power and other factors that affect their relationship” (Nikolova 2007: 27). The relationship between client and consultant according to Nikolova is a relationship between people that bring their own different perspectives, views, interests, goals and motivations etc. (Nikolova 2007: 73). It is therefore also a very complex matter. Her analytical tool consists of the introduction of a fourth model besides the current three, which according to her exist, in the literature on client-consultant relationship. As this thesis focuses on the missing client perspective, emphasis in the review of each of the models is upon the clients’ assumed role.

As well as Pemer and Werr (Pemer & Werr 2005) Nikolova uses the different models of consulting in the literature to explore the relationship between clients and consultants. The nature of the problem, which the client wants to solve, is dependent on the nature of their relationship. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between different kinds of problem types as these influences the relationship. Therefore, in the thesis by Nikolova, a typology of problems by Reihlen is used (Reihlen 1997 cited in Nikolova 2007: 47). Reihlen distinguishes between exact and inexact problems. Exact problems are by definition:
Problems that are relatively unambiguous and do not require clients and consultants to use time in defining the problem they face. Exact problems can be solved in a rational and formalized process, where a logical deduction of the problem is used. It does not therefore require a high interaction between clients and consultants. Inexact problems on the contrary require that both consultant and clients are creative and the interaction between them is very high throughout the process. Both parts need to discuss several aspects to the problem itself as well as on its solution (Reihlen 1997 in Nikolova 2007: 47).

In a consulting context Nikolova distinguishes whether the problems are of routine or innovative character. This is dependent on whether the consultants have some previous experience in solving these problems. Routine problems are according to Nikolova: Problems with what consultants are familiar with from previous projects. Consultants facing routine problems posses background knowledge for solving similar problems (Nikolova 2007: 48). Innovative problems are new problems and where the consultant does not have any experience and background knowledge in solving similar problems (ibid). Nikolova uses three general problems to analyse each of the consulting models in her thesis. Simple routine problems, Complex routine problems and Innovative problems. Each of these three problem types will be used in the following review of each of her models.

Table 1: Problem types

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<th>Exact problems</th>
<th>Inexact problems</th>
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<tr>
<td>Routine problems</td>
<td>Simple routine problems</td>
<td>Complex routine problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>Innovative problems</td>
<td>Innovative problems</td>
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Source: Nikolova 2007: 49, emphasis is on the original)

Nikolova argues that as “some kind of interaction takes place between the client and the consultant it makes the analysis of the degree and nature of interaction indispensable”. (Nikolova 2007: 34). The goal of the team consisting of client and consultant is to solve a management problem, which means they are doing some kind of problem-solving or decision making.
As previously mentioned, then according to Nikolova, three different models (expert, reflective practitioner, and Critical model) on the relationship between clients and consultants exist. Whereas, a fourth model (Interpretive model) is developed to compensate for the shortcomings in the previous three models. The following is a summary on each of the models, what is assumed in relation to the client-consultant relationship and what the critique to it is. Emphasis is on how the client is assumed to act within the different types of client-consultant relationship. This is all different as each type of model assumes different roles. Furthermore, the way knowledge is transferred from consultant to client, is assumed differently as well as their epistemological foundations.

### 9.3 The expert model

In the expert model, it is assumed that the consultant possesses expert knowledge which the client does not possess. Consultants are therefore considered to be experts in their fields. This is also the oldest established model on client-consultant interaction. Consultants know better than their clients what they need and thus the knowledge of the consultants is seen as superior to the knowledge that clients possess (O’Farrell and Moffat 1991 cited in Nikolova 2007: 5). The relationship presupposes that the consultant is neutral in order to give an unbiased view of the organization as an outsider and their relationship is generally described as a contractual relationship with a mutual agreement on objectives, scope of the project, and final fee for the consultant. The asymmetric knowledge transfer between client and consultant is also a factor why the role of the client is limited the delivery of information (Lane D. 1994: 86-88 cited in Nikolova 2007: 100).

#### 9.3.1 The relationship between the client and the consultant

The role of the client in the expert model is limited to that of an information provider in the problem-solving process. The client must provide the consultant with the necessary knowledge needed to solve the current problem. This is often in the form of organization policies and other internal knowledge. After having completed this phase, it is up to the client to wait for the consultant’s proposal. It is therefore crucial for a successful knowledge transfer between client and consultant that the consultant is able to ask for the right information and to judge whether this information is appropriate, this fact it is argued, also makes the
motivation for the client to work with the consultant lower (Kubr 1996: 54-56 cited in Nikolova 2007: 100).

Clients are assumed to provide the information, which consultants need to solve the client problem. The client provides the raw data, which is left to the consultant to process and transform into a solution. The consultant then diagnose and prescribe a solution, whereas the client is left unaware about this process and as a result to this only has a limited effect on the final outcome or solution (McGivern 1983: 435 cited in Nikolova 2007). It is therefore also assumed that the client is dependent on the consultant in form of their expertise. However, supporters of this model argue that their relationship is equalized as the client has contractual power in the form of the ability to fire the client (Werr and Styhre 2003: 47 – cited in Nikolova 2007: 102).

The relationship between client and consultant as it is assumed in the expert model is seen as very efficient as the client does not need to have long and time consuming meetings during their stay in the company. This is also very similar to cases where the client has hired consultants to do outsourcing task. e.g. jobs which they themselves does not possess the required knowledge to solve. Examples to this are services such as recruitment, training, testing, accounting etc. (Nikolova 2007: 106)The model can therefore be assumed to be appropriate when the issue is not very complex and more of an outsourcing task. In expert consulting the client is seen more as a buyer of standardized solutions rather than a solution which is jointly developed together with the consultant. The model however has several implications when it tries to solve problems, which are more complex and multifaceted as in the case of management consulting, strategy formulation etc. (Schön 1983:297-298 cited in Nikolova 2007: 106)

9.3.2 Shortcomings

The expert model however is being criticised for the positivist assumption of how it regards knowledge and power (Nikolova 2007: 106). It claims that consultants are assumed experts that have the ability to “give the right advice, in the right way, to the right person and at the right time” (Nikolova 2007: 107). Their role as outsiders gives them the ability to be unbiased in their view of the organisation as their assessment of the situation is honest and objective. Therefore, they can tell what the client organisation needs to do without being concerned
about how it affects the client interest (Nikolova 2007: 107 and Alvesson & Johansson 2002). The expert model fits well with a model of consulting were the client buys a generalized service in form of knowledge. It implies that the client is a passive listener to the recommendations of the consultant. The type of assignment is standardized and not created jointly and the time spent for the client is assumed limited. Their limited interaction also means that the learning between client and consultant is very limited. Schön gives a good suggestion to this issue as he concludes that due to the limited interaction between client and consultant there is also a lack of understanding to what the real problem is and to what the client expects from the consultant (Schön 1983: 305 cited in Nikolova 2007: 112).

Due to the dominance the consultant exerts in the relationship, the client may feel marginalized in their relationship and to regain control might hold back important information (Coopey/Bourgoyne 2000 cited in Nikolova 2007: 112). Hislop (Hislop 2002:667 cited in Nikolova 2007: 112) furthermore claims that the higher a consultants power and autonomy is in the process of problem solving, the lower would be the scale of the customization of the solution which the consultant provides the client with. Therefore, it is argued that clients get less innovative and individualized solutions. The incentive for the consultant to provide standardized solutions is too high. (Ritzer 2004: 1-10 cited in Nikolova 2007: 112). It is assumed that expert consulting is a view on consulting where client and consultants do not work intensively together. The expert model is a general model where emphasis still is on the consultant. The model ignores how social and contextual factors on individuals influence the relationship (Nikolova 2007: 108). The expert model assumes that clients can rely on consultants, due to their reputation of being experts, and therefore do not need to interact intensively with the consultant. Consultants are more or less left for them to do the work. This is suitable for a problem which is not very complex, and where scope and goal has been clearly defined by the client. As previous mentioned this is often the case when consultants are hired to take care of training, recruiting etc, but not where consultants are hired to help clients realise their full potential (Nikolova 2007: 117).
9.4 The Reflective Practitioner model

The reflective practitioner model has contrary to the expert model more emphasis on the client, which was developed as a response to the growing criticism on expert consulting, by Schön (Schön 1983). In this model, the interaction between client and consultant is seen as a reflective conversation. His understanding on the client relationship builds on the nature of consulting knowledge based on the two types of consulting expertise: Knowing-in-action and reflection-in-action (Nikolova 2007:119). Knowing-in-action is a term by Schön, which Nikolova defines as “knowledge that is based on tacit rules and procedures. It is routinely applicable when solving familiar problems” (Ibid p. 120). Schön’s main argument is that consultants, like other professionals use their knowing in action, which they reflect on. This might be a situation they have experienced before or a project they as consultants have undertaken. However, also when consultants experience unfamiliar situations they engage in reflection-in-action (Ibid). This is a process, which Schön describes as follows: “When someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context. He is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the unique case. His inquiry is not limited to a deliberation about means, which depends on a prior agreement about ends. He does not keep means and ends separate, but defines them interactively as he frames a problematic situation. He does not separate thinking from doing, ratiocinating his way to a decision, which he must later convert to action. Because his experimenting is a kind of action, implementation is built into his inquiry. Thus reflection-in-action can proceed, even in situations of uncertainty and uniqueness, because it is not bound by the dichotomies of Technical Rationality” (Schön 1983: 68-69 quoted from Nikolova 2007: 121).

9.4.1 The relationship between the client and the consultant

Schön (Schön 1983) argues that clients have to be more involved in the problem-solving process and stresses that problems must be formulated in joint collaboration between both client and consultant. In discussing the transfer of knowledge, Schön points out that the role of the client is to make his/her situation accessible to the consultant (Schön 1983: 202 cited in Nikolova 2007: 122). The consultant role is to help the client reflect and understand the meaning and reason for the client’s actions (Schön 1983: 297 cited in Nikolova 2007: 122-123). Clients furthermore must function as reflective practitioners themselves. An exchange
of perspectives must take place between client and consultant, otherwise the consultants expertise remains a black box for the client. (Ibid p. 301). Clients therefore must “develop a new kind of skill in asking questions” and “cultivate competence in reflective conversation with the professional” (Ibid).

Schön sees the reflection-in-action as the main factor which both clients and consultant need to develop in order for them to work successful and effectively together (Nikolova 2007: 126). Consulting from this model is time consuming and motivation is therefore naturally an important factor for the kind of client-consultant relationship Schön proposes (Ibid).

Schön views the relationship between client and consultant as balanced. Both are powerful and interdependent (Schön 1983: 294-297 cited in Nikolova 2007: 124) and they both contribute to the problem-solving process, contrary to the expert model. The consultants accept that the client knows more about the problem, contrary to them (consultants) cannot control their relationship. Consultants are then expected to reflect on their own knowledge and understanding of the problem and present this to the client. Their expertise and knowledge is therefore not kept mysterious or private as in the expert model. It is assumed that clients join the consultant in the problem-solving process and make their experiences and knowledge clear to the consultants. They agree to confront the consultant with questions if something is not understood correctly. Their relationship is therefore assumed to be equilibrated as they both give and receive help. It is according to Schön clear that both client and consultant are both responsible for the norms and expectations that each part brings to the relationship.(Ibid p. 303). Because clients and consultant belong to different communities, they each interpret the situation differently, which is why Schön recognizes that both client and consultant formulates the problem jointly (Nikolova 2007: 122).

9.4.2 Shortcomings

According to Nikolova (Nikolova 2007). Schön does not discuss how each part (consultant and client) belong to different communities of practice that is a fact, which according to him just exists. He does not mention how these differences can be solved, other than by discussing intensively with the client. How the translation process, for both consultant and client can be improved, is never mentioned. Furthermore, although he provides a view on knowledge and how it is created and transferred, he still considers the creation of
knowledge to be left to the consultant, without including the client in this process (Nikolova 2007: 128). Schön does recognise that clients should share their view on the problem to the consultant, as well as the consultant should share his view with the client and why they see it this way. However, he does not see the creation of the advice given by the consultant as a process in which the client participates. His view on this is similar to the expert model. Furthermore when it comes to power relations, he does not answer whose perspective that will be used when the client and consultant does not see the problem the same way. Which of the parties – client or consultant will take over power and lead the way in the problem-solving process? (Nikolova 2007: 129) Contrary, Schön sees the increased interaction between client and consultant and their role as reflective practitioners as a reason to why there are no real power issues.

The reflective practitioner type of consulting is very time consuming, and is therefore only worth using in situations where the problem is of innovative character, whereas expert consulting is used in the case of simple routine problems.

9.5 The critical model
The critical model is based on the critical works on consulting and its proponents: among others: Clark, Alvesson, Clark and Salaman, Kieser, O’shea and Madigan and Jackson. Their focus aims to explain the nature of consulting and moreover the reason for client’s dissatisfaction with clients has made the starting point for the critical model. The critical model has a different approach to the relationship than Schön’s expert model. It is assumed that the knowledge transfer between the client and consultant is different and that rhetoric and stories are used by consultants to impress the client and thereby buy the services offered are important factors (Nikolova 2007:147). Consultants are therefore impression managers and their interaction is designed to lure the client. Consulting knowledge is assumed to be developed in interaction with the clients and constructed during client-consultant interactions. It does not exist prior to the However consultants “do not possess and cannot deploy a body of formal, authoritative theoretical professional knowledge to underpin their work, because there is no such knowledge” (Fincham and Clark 2002: 8-9. The critical model proposes that meanings are subjectively constructed and therefore follows an interpretivist epistemology (Nikolova 2007: 141).
9.5.1 The relationship between the client and the consultant

Clients are involved to a higher extent in the interaction as proposed by the expert model. They do not just consume consultant advice, however their interaction is characterized by negotiations, “where consultants reflect and modify client meanings together with the client” (Nikolova 2007: 135). It assumes that client managers are co-producers of consulting services. The consultant’s success is dependent on how the manager reacts towards the consultant’s actions. The dominance of consultants is therefore not absolute but dependent on how the client reacts. Only when managers accept consultant’s dominance they become empowered. (Ibid p. 136).

Client managers are regarded as passive actors, who due to the assumed insecurity of their job task and ambiguities regarding their personal lives, career etc. and their wish to be up to date with the new development within management, are irrational actors that consume the advice given by the consultants (See also previous review on the critical literature). Their irrational status as actors results in a missing client emphasis in the critical model. Instead, consultants are seen as the active part in their relationship. It is argued by proponents of the critical model that clients become dependent to consultancy advice as the consultant constantly introduces new fads and fashions in management. Kieser for example explains that the constant introduction of new management ideas raises client manager’s insecurity as competitors are also implementing these fads and fashions. This leads to higher competition and thus increases the receptivity towards new management fashions. It all leads to an environment where client manager’s fear of losing control lead to a dependency on the consultant who claim to promise clients that they can regain that control (Kieser 2002a: 173-176 cited in Nikolova 2007:134). It can be claimed however that in cases where consultants are brought in to execute unpopular management solutions such as for example layoffs (Kieser 2002b: 214 cited in Nikolova 2007: 135) the consultant is the dependent actor who follows the guidelines and rules set by the client top management. As the consultant hopes for more assignments, it can be hard not to follow this course. In this situation, it can be speculated whether the client as well as the consultant are not aware of these aspects.
9.5.2 Shortcomings

It is assumed in the critical model that even when clients and consultants do share the same social context, they still produce equivocal knowledge. Their client-consultant interaction are seen as “idiosyncratic discourses rather than as a source of the development of some shared understanding (Hassard 1999: 183-187 cited p. 142 in Nikolova). This statement ignores the fact that clients and consultant can develop some shared knowledge (Nikolova 2007: 142). This may for instance be in the case where the client has knowledge about the same consulting concepts and models and therefore has fewer problems in evaluating the consulting service as well as the suggested problem solutions proposed by the consultant (ibid). A problem with the critical model is therefore that it ignores the fact that clients and consultants can develop shared meanings, which thereby improves the knowledge transfer between the two parties. However, it does not emphasize how the consulting knowledge is accepted by the client. Furthermore, as the knowledge the consultant provides to the client is mainly seen as rhetoric and stories with a symbolic character it denies the possibility of any transfer of knowledge between client and consultant (Ibid p. 143). These are mainly seen as impression and persuasion instruments. Huczynski for example points out, as a counter argument that consultants have to use stories and rhetoric to enhance the communication with managers: “They [managers] have difficulty understanding excessively technical language; have a short span of attention; a limited span of memory and judgement; and tend to be more convinced by certain modes of communication than others. Popular management ideas take these limitations into account”. (Huczynski1993a: 60 cited in Nikolova 2007: 143). By treating consultancy as an institution that is set up to lure clients and impress them, it also does not answer the question why managers increasingly are using consultancy services. It also ignores the fact that client may resist the power of consultants (Nikolova 2007: 145). Clients knowledge are furthermore ignored because the model is based on the assumption that knowledge is ambiguous and that knowledge transfer does not exist as it is more about persuading others in the value of one’s knowledge (Ibid) “Clients are addicted to consultants’ fashions” is a view that prevails. The model itself is too simplified in the relationship between consultants and clients and underplays the input of clients during the interaction. Furthermore, the critical model does not, contrary to the expert, differentiate between the different groups of actors that are involved in the projects.
Its emphasis is on consulting projects where the type of problem is of innovative and complex character and therefore ignores the type of projects where clients want a fast and efficient solution for a familiar problem (Nikolova 2007: 147). The relationship according to the critical model is a one way relationship where emphasis is on the consultants and what they do to impress their clients (Ibid). To sum up the client role in the critical model is of a passive character. Clients are seen as actors in a play and as audience (See also Goffman and Clark) performed by the consultants. Clients are described as addicts to consultancy advice and the model ignores the aspect of what the client has to offer in the relationship. This is missing in the model.

9.6 The interpretive model

The interpretive model is according to Nikolova a model, which has a dialectic nature and combines the previous three models. A dialectic approach is an approach where each model is counter posed and their differences outlined. (Nikolova 2007: 151 - also see the work of Morgan 1983: 377). By introducing the ideas of Schön of different practice communities and Loasby concept of interpretive communities the model argues that some of the problems, which may arise during client-consultant interaction in terms of knowledge, transfer can be found in the existence of different interpretive communities. (Nikolova 2007: 152) It is their membership to different interpretive communities that according to Nikolova is the reason “why clients and consultants may have problems in understanding each other’s language” (Nikolova 2007: 283).

9.6.1 The relationship between the client and the consultant

As an answer to this the interpretive model develops a number of suggestions for both clients and consultants as to how to improve their cooperation (Ibid p. 152). This is contrary to the critical model which does not provide any insights on how to improve the collaboration between clients and consultants as it views consultants in a pessimistic and critical way (Ibid). However, Nikolova sees the growing evidence on client’s dissatisfaction with consultants as a sign of “disfunctionalities” which can still be found in the relationship between clients and consultants. Her hope with the interpretive model is therefore that it will help clients and consultants to develop a better understanding of their interaction (Nikolova 2007: 151). Nikolova suggests that a new fourth model is used to explain the
complex nature of client-consultant relationship. It contributes to the existing literature and the general accepted three models on client-consultant relationship as it extends and builds upon these models. It should make managers and consultants aware of underexplored issues in their interactions during consulting projects. The interpretative model stresses that clients need to be aware of the different roles that consultants play during the interaction. According to this model, it is too simplistic to regard consultants as experts, impression managers, and reflective practitioners as assumed in each model and as pointed out in the current literature. Rather they must be regarded as being a part of each model, it depends on context and for what problem the consultant is hired.

9.6.2 Shortcomings

The interpretive model can be argued to have a weakness as it is theoretically deduced rather than empirically induced. However much of the work which the previous three models build upon is empirical works themselves (Nikolova 2007:280). Furthermore, the model with its prescriptive advice to consultants and clients on how to improve their relationship may not hold true to its foundation of critical realism. This may more be in line the positivistic tradition (Ibid p. 281). Trust is also an important issue, which influences the transfer of knowledge and the power relations between client and consultant. However, the interpretive model makes clear that trust might not be independent of power (Ibid p. 282).

Clients have to be aware of the different types of consulting and be very careful in the selecting process making sure that their needs are met. In selecting the consultant they should furthermore pay attention to how the type of consulting affects their relationship with the consultant and how it also affects the final outcome. Instead of looking for the ideal type of client interaction as suggested by Fosstenløkken (Fosstenløkken et alt. 2003: 876) clients, need to be aware of the fact that there are many types of client-consultant relationship and that all of them are appropriate. According to Nikolova the type of relationship depends on the context, the type of problem to be solved and it affects the outcome of the project. Both when selecting the consultant and more importantly they need to be aware of what the different types of consulting mean to them. The decision of what type of consulting has to be decided during the interaction process with the consultant, and not before or after. (Nikolova 2007: 286). For the consultant “they must learn how to enlarge
their professional discourses to fit, rather than silence, client’s stories. In addition, they must learn to redefine institutional roles and relations to permit clients and “interpretive communities” to collaborate in telling their stories and sharing their interpretations, and make room for client stories and start sharing their interpretations” (Ibid.)

Nikolova, furthermore concludes that where her work aims to explain the nature of client-consultant relationships, based on the insights provided by the interpretive model, future research can take a more normative approach in research on client-consultant relationships. (Nikolova 2007). The interpretive model builds on a power and knowledge approach to the client-consultant relationship and offers the researchers a view on how each of these components, elements and forces influences the client-consultant interaction and thereby help explains it. Nikolova ends her work by saying that future research on consulting should recognize the complex nature of the client-consultant relationship and it needs to combine different theoretical and methodological approaches. Her work should therefore be the first step towards a more multidisciplinary approach in client-consultant research. (Nikolova 2007: 287)

Throughout the literature review is has been clear that the role the client play in the client-consultant collaboration is still underexplored in current research. The literature review has hopefully given the reader an understanding of the client-consultant relationship and the different perspectives to the relationship. Four general models of the relationship have been looked through and we have seen how each model assumes different roles to both parts in the relationship. These roles will be examined empirically more thoroughly in the next section where the interviews with different managers about their relationship with the consultant is subject to the analysis in order to see how the managers perceive consultants and how they are being managed. With these models it is aim to analyse the interviews as they can provide an underlying understanding of how the client role is assumed.
10 Analysis

As seen in the previous section, the client role consists of many metaphors and roles which describes their relationship to the consultants they hire. Decisive for this role is the client manager’s understanding of consultants in general, the purpose they are hired for and how the managers believe the consultants should be managed. Therefore, this analysis concentrates on how the client plays his role in the relationship as well as how the consultant is perceived. As a result to this, the other part; the consultant is not included in the analysis. The analysis builds on interviews with four managers, who each have experienced consultants and worked together with consultants to accomplish many different tasks in their organisation. This ranges from varied task as, strategy formulation, implementation of Six Sigma to outsourcing tasks as recruiting and education of employees and expert consulting.

The analysis is divided into 3 areas. Firstly it is analysed what happens before and during the collaboration with a consultant as this is decisive for their future relation. Secondly, it is analysed how the interviewed managers have perceived the consultants they have had in their organization. Thirdly, a final section discusses these findings.

As previous mentioned, the client is described as a passive part in most of the literature. This is due to the historical reasons where the consultant was considered as the expert and foremost possessed an expert knowledge, which was external to the client. The role of the client is therefore important to analyse as it decides and builds the foundations for their relationship as a whole.

However, as we saw in the theory section on expert consultancy (see also Nikolova) the time client and consultant spends together is limited and it ignores how other factors (outer circumstances) influence their relationship. It is therefore important to show how the different modes to consultancy in each case are used and how the client acknowledges the fact that each type of assignment requires a different approach and role in solving the problem by both client and consultant. Furthermore, the role the client enacts is also dynamic in nature as the client changes and enacts a role which the client sees fit for the assignment in relation to the consultant.
10.1 Before

The reason to bring in a consultant determines their relationship as the client expectations is created in this phase. Before this happens the client has an issue he/she needs help in solving. However due to nature of services as previous pointed out by Clark (Clark 1995 see also chapter on the dramaturgical metaphor) this selection process is rather difficult for the client.

“When I am looking for a consultant, it is important to get the knowledge I myself do not possess. It is in that case it is crucial to me to prove whether he/she posses that knowledge. So I thereby make sure he/she has something to contribute with in this regard” (Damgaard)

The above quote describes what the client is often looking for when he decides to hire a consultant. As Clark also points out it is difficult for the consumer to test the quality of the service due to the nature services generally has. Foremost the quality of a service. If we compare this to the above mentioned manager, then his task consist of three steps. First is to make sure which consultants who possess the knowledge, which the client not already has. Secondly, it is crucial to prove the quality of the offered service to make sure the consultant can contribute with something. Thirdly, the client must see how this differs from the original he has made. Especially the problem of proving the quality of the offered service was something that was very important to all of the interviewed managers and to overcome this problem they each made a timely effort to check up upon the consultant.

However as Clark points out it can be very difficult for the client to prove the quality of the service which is why the selection processes of the consultant becomes very important. (Clark 1995: 39). All the interviewed managers each do a huge job in checking up upon the consultant. They check his existing CV, tries to see whether the consultant posses the knowledge they need and whether the consultant has experience in solving these kinds of problem and finally what the outcome were to it. This can in short be described as the “how to make sure this consultant is the right for me problem” or how they make sure the consultant possess the knowledge which is demanded by the client in order to make sure the consultant has something to contribute with in the process.

Each of the managers does a huge job in telling the consultant how they each experience the challenges by the assignment, as they need to avoid the consultant running amok and
inventing new problems themselves. To avoid this, they each inform the consultant about the frame of the problem and how they see it. This is for example evident in the following quote by Lanng:

“often we hire those, as I said solves a concrete problem from our definition of the problem in question...They enter our organisation and solves the problem, however often things go awry, cause we miss exactly what is my most important role, to tell the consultant what his most important task is, which is to define the frame of the project” (Lanng).

This quote is quite interesting as it touches upon the definition of the task for which the consultant is hired. Especially the definition of the consultant assignment is very crucial to the client managers as they otherwise risk that the consultant runs amok in the organization as some of them expressed. Therefore they see it very important to strictly define what the consultant’s task is. However, what is very important is that this is made from their definition of the problem, leaving little room for the consultant to be active. This has also complications for the consultant as he/she is forced to follow his client, which also might give the consultant an objective of not being objective and go against what the client wants. This is illustrated in the following quote:

...“my task is to approve the consultant, and as I have had others to complete and perform the project, my task is to explain to the consultant, the same picture of the world, as the managers they are meant to work with. Meaning, what is the role of the company at the time, what happens in the project, as well as what it is we need to support, in order to avoid a headless implementing of their project. (Lanng)

Here the client almost takes over the role of the consultant, as Lanng sees it important to make sure that the consultant has the same picture of the world as himself, but also the outer context of the assignment. What reasons do the client have by calling in the consultant, what are the outer frames of the project. The quote above also shows that Lanng’s primary role according to himself is that of an information provider. His role is to explain the frames of the project as well as telling the consultant what to do and it is important to him that the consultant has the same view of the problem as he. One of the reasons for this is seen in the following quote. This has mainly to do with the fact that Lanng is a professional buyer of consultancy. The company he represents uses consultants to help
assist him when a lack of knowledge occurs or when they cannot perform the task themselves. However, what is most important in this phase is to tell the consultants their version of the assignment in question and what it is that needs to be done. The definition and description of the assignment is therefore seen as being very important. Especially because the client managers struggles with the fact that they do not know what they get before they get it. This is illustrated below by Lanng and Götzsche.

“Personally, I think we could have gotten more out of version 1, or first version we made, if we spent some time on introducing them to our challenge.” (Lanng)

And:

“In the definition of the assignment in question, one needs to be very detailed in describing. Furthermore it is necessary to receive a very detailed offer from the consultant, which describes what task they need to solve and foremost what is set as final goal. In case you avoid this it relates to having issued a blank check...You therefore need to be very skilled and sharp in defining really clearly what you want to get out of it, without of course knowing the outcome beforehand.” (Götzsche)

And the manager Damgaard, follows the argument by Clark (Clark 1995), about the nature of consulting and how most clients cope with these challenges. Most of these challenges have to do with the fact that service is an intangible product

“I want to know something about their methods, the principles they use. What kind of tools do they posses to control and manage this, for instance, process of strategy. How have they thought about accomplishing this assignment. Then I check up on their experience, as everyone can call themselves consultants. This can actually be done without having less than premises” (Damgaard)

Damgaard therefore finds it important to check up on their general experience and knowledge about the consultant task. Most importantly, what their previous experiences are in solving these tasks as there are no effective barriers of entry into the business of consultancy.

The type of consultant, which the client looks for or the selection process is also mentioned in the literature to be very important. The following quote by Lanng shows that he as a client
also reflects on the type of assignment required by the consultant before he decides to hire a consultant. In this case in the quote below between the strategy consultant and the expert consultant.

“It depends, in the case of the strategy consultant, then it is something, about what kind of change process they should enter. What experience do they posses from earlier assignments. In case it is these expert consultants, then it is clients of reference, proven records, it is their professional competences they should make the buy in on.” (Lanng)

It can therefore be argued that clients are aware that the problem in question needs different approaches and types of consultants and more importantly this is something they are well aware of.

10.2 During
What role the client plays during the assignment varies much depending on the type of assignment for which the client has hired the consultant. For the interviewed managers for example it is common that they do a lot of checking up on the consultant during the period of their collaboration. Whereas other managers prefer to have a meeting, once in a while, where they make sure that progress is made.

“Out of the 9 to 10 weeks, it is just a checkmark we put, and says well now it runs, then I sometimes has to intervene and say well now too much has been spent on the processing and too little on progress.” (Lanng)

This is generally a process where the client plays a more passive role, mostly because of the lack of time, but also because as the manager Damgaard explains, the consultant needs time and freedom to implement his solution to the problem.

"Then we have an ongoing dialogue, where we stop in the process once in a while, and say is it running as it should. Latest, in this regard we have been doing some follow up, after they (consultants) have visited each country and presented their ideas. .. Then they have been out successively, three months, and initiated the process, see if we are on track, have they made the things as agreed upon etc... Then I receive some kind of feedback on whether things are running as they are supposed to”. (Damgaard)
10.3 Client relationship – perception of consultants

In this section it is analysed how the interviewed managers perceive the consultants and have experienced their presence. The perception of consultants is furthermore influenced by the outer context in which the relationship between them exists. An outer context which includes the nature of the assignment in question, background to why it needs to be solved etc.

One of the managers questions the knowledge, which the consultants have. In this case mostly the academic approach to consultancy and especially the strategy making process for which he has hired the consultant. As he says:

"I am an opponent to those cases where I believe it gets so academic it cannot be accomplished in the real world. Well, it can get so advanced that time just go by looking at this process or tool, instead of looking at the final result in the end". (Damgaard)

From the quote above it can be interpreted that the manager has a hands on approach to consultancy and express a distance to academic “consultobabble”.

One general perception which all of the interviewed managers expressed, where the fact that consultants have only one agenda, which was to sell more. This is seen in the quote below where Damgaard and Lanng explain:

...“I think that many consultants, not that much in a fairly small company like ours, but at some of the greater companies. There it is for the consultant the main agenda to sell as many hours as possible. Being with the larger accounts, main agenda is to keep the wheels turning, providing yourself with new assignments all the time”. (Damgaard)

And:

“Not in a small company like ours, but in one of the larger companies. There is the agenda for the consultant to sell as much hours as he can. Hmm, on a general basis, is the goal”. They know that part of their success depends on how many they can serve their message to.” (Lanng)

Another reason for the consultants to sell as many hours as possible is the fact that it is a mean to survive. Another mean to survive is to come up with new assignments which is also
something the interviewed managers have experienced. This is seen in the below quote by Lanng who says:

"This is something you know when you work with consultants, this is what is happening in the process before final delivery and handover, it is their survival. This is something we experience in almost any case, that they suggest a second project, immediately by the closing of project number 1". (Lanng)

The above fact that consultants uses the invention of new projects as a mean to survive, also put pressure on the client, as he needs to check up on the consultant otherwise he would have bought more than he actually needs. This is also seen in the following quote by Lanng, it should however be noticed that the case is a bit exceptional due to the fact that he uses a consultancy with a broad and huge professional expertise.

“Yes, they are driven by an increased turnover generated by more projects and that is how they do business... As a client you just need to be extremely aware of these things. There are no limits to what the consultancy is capable of... – for example specialist in different areas – they can bring those in and say: “by the way we do have a specialist in the US who we can have flown in tomorrow”. It is however extremely difficult to decline this offer because naturally I am interested in that. I just need to be razor sharp in what I need, otherwise I may have bought all of their professional skills. And this is furthermore something I tend to be impressed of, simply due to their professional skills”. (Lanng)

This quote clearly shows that a client, who is dealing with a consultancy which posses many areas of competence, needs to be quite specific in the description of what he actually needs. Furthermore, it is a reason for why the definition of the assignment and its frames were very important to all of the interviewed managers. For this manager it is important not to become too impressed because it may result in a situation where he loses control and becomes too ecstatic.

How the consultant participates in the organisation and how he is perceived by the managers is also important as they need to be accepted by the client managers. This was evident in the interviews as the informants all talked about trust to the consultant and how they needed to accept the consultant as a person.
Another perception of consultants by one of the interviewed managers is on how the consultant can be both part of the process as well as the factor which initiates it. In this regard the manager below compares the consultant to that process in chemistry where a substance is catalyst.

“It is just as in a process of chemistry – two different processes exists, one thing where the chemical substance is part of the process, whereas and that is what I call the old fashioned management consultant, where they each individually come up with a report, in which they write he or she are meant to be fired, and that the organisation needs to be changed like this and that – right. Whereas the consultant can be a catalyst, which I personally wants my management consultants to be. A catalyst which initiates the process, without being part of the process”. (Manager 4)

This distinction between initiating the process and being part of it and then initiating the process but not being part of, is related to how the client manager wants the consultant to act. The manager above has a preference for the latter, which can be explained by the fact that the general management historically did not believe in the use of management consultants. Management consultants should not act in the role as managers, but act as catalyst and therefore not be part of the process they start, this places them in the role as active managers whereas the client is left passive in this situation.

The claim that the relationship cannot be seen as straightforward but more of an ongoing exchange of views and evolving in nature is also evident in the below quote by Damgaard:

“Clearly, this part of being a consultant, that is to say, well this is not sustainable. No, what ever it might be. And that is part of the discussion and that dialogue there is, when you run such a process. It takes places both between internal persons in this group, but of course also towards the consultant. He should be able to spare with you in such things”. (Damgaard)

This quote shows that Damgaard as a client is well aware of the fact that you do not always agree with the consultant, and when you do not it is important that you express it, so it does not affect the task the consultant was hired to do.
10.4 Client advice for other clients

The following section analyses what can be defined as good advice, which the client managers gave during the interviews. However besides some great advice, it also tells us how they perceive the consultant in the collaboration.

"Be honest and open towards them. Make sure that the trust which is needed is present and be honest and open towards them. In that way they receive the opportunity to work with things. Cause if they during the process finds out that they have only received half of the truth, then they do not have the chance to know which kind of assignment they have accepted to solve". (Damgaard)

In the above quote it is evident that trust and honesty is something which the client manager considers to be important. Furthermore, it is important to tell them the whole truth in order to avoid any second agendas. The following quotes also show that you need to be on top of things, you need to be critical.

"If you are not sharp and follow up all the time, then I do not believe it succeeds, and if the organisation itself is not accepting the people which are in the house (consultants author remark.) Then you will not make progress, it will not succeed”. (Damgaard)

..."You need to be critical towards who you decide to hire. That is partly on recommendations or experiences..Well you need to know what it is you want to be solved. You need to be quite strict in the definition. If not then you risk that the selection of consultants and the execution of it fail. At least that is the way I see it”. (Götzsche)

The above quote can be interpreted as the client believes that it is his own fault if you are not strict in the definition of what it is that need to be solved. In other words he can only blame himself if something goes wrong in the process.

"You need to create a common frame of references, from which you work and then all the time return to it and say yes, we agree on this, now we have decided this is what we do. Secondly, be loyal to it, all the way. And then it is quite often a good idea to have one who can keep you on track all the time. In order to avoid any sidetracks..”. (Damgaard)
According to this quote it is quite evident that this manager uses the consultant to stay on top of things. But he also uses the consultant to avoid any sidetracks and be loyal and trust previous decisions. How this manager perceives consultants is mostly positive, namely to help assist him in his managing task, which he himself does not have time for.

10.5 Client advice for other consultants
Besides giving advice to other clients they also gave advice to other consultants, as a way to express how they perceived the consultants.

“The chemistry itself first becomes interesting, when they are able to relate their presentation to the challenges which are present in my current organisation. This is the reason why I find it important, before I decide to meet with a new consultant, actually I insist hardly to explain my challenges the way I see them, on the phone before I decide to meet them one on one”. (Lanng)

This quote above clearly shows that this client is not looking for at standardized service, which he obviously has experienced before, contrary it is important to him that the consultancy succeeds in relating the service to his needs and current situation. Due to the nature of services, he cannot know what he is exactly buying before he gets it and in order to avoid him wasting his time, he deems it very important to tell the consultant exactly how he sees the problem to be solved. This concern of buying a service which did not exactly fit their needs was generally something which was evident for all the client managers.

11 The use of consultants: theme two
In this section I will touch upon the use of consultants and the many discussions there are regarding the subject. Firstly I will try to analyse upon why and for what purpose the managers (and sometime the companies) are using consultants. Secondly I will analyse the different pitfalls there might be by using consultants. Thirdly I will analyse upon how managers themselves are influenced when they are using consultants and how they feel consultants should be managed.

11.1 Why hire a consultant?
The reason why a client decides to hire a consultant has been much debated in current literature. Some authors like Sturdy argue that the dependency is created due to the daily
struggles which managers must cope with (see also Watson 1995) and others because of their management responsibility where lack of time makes it impossible to fulfil these tasks themselves.

As debated in the current literature, there is a huge discussion on why and how consultants are used by managers dependent on which perspective to consultancy you lay. Most of the managers in this study however mention the fact that consultants should be used when their organisation lacks the skills, or when they themselves as managers lack the needed skills. This is seen in the following quotes by both Götzsche, Lanng and Damgaard:

“As a manager of this, I myself would never have been capable of, neither timewise nor competency wise to manage and drive the process in this way”. (Götzsche)

...“implementation of IT, sales education, sales strategy, call center experts”. (Lanng)

...“how to run our strategyprocess, how we run, what is it we want to achieve, set the goal for us. Being a driver “a catalyst” for the background process and getting it structured”. (Damgaard)

“We want a defined strategy, we need to discuss which direction we should take...Getting the frames defined and what services it is we need to develop in the future. Where do we want to move forward in the future?”. (Damgaard)

As illustrated above the task for which the consultant is hired is very varied in nature. One of the consequences of this is the fact that the managers need to be very specific in regards to the task the consultant has to solve. They need to make sure that the consultant they hire is the right one for the job.

The next quote illustrates that sometimes consultants are even used as temporary workers:

“We have both arms and feet, it might as well just have been an employee during peak loads. Then we also have what we call expert knowledge, where for example, we need to enter new areas in our business, where we hire some expertise to make sure our own employees are updated, or we might as well say this knowledge/these skills, it is very rare we need it, so it is too expensive to have inhouse”. (Manager 4)
The manager in this situation compares his use of consultants as that of temporary workers. As seen above the task for which consultants are used, is very varied but common to all of them is the client perceived lack of knowledge or time. It varies however, how the consultant is involved in the process and how much room the client leaves for the consultant to find these solutions. This becomes clear in the next section, where it is analysed for what purpose the consultant is hired.

11.2 For what purpose are consultants hired?

The most common purpose for the consultants to be hired is as providers of knowledge which the client does not possess himself. This is shown in the following quote by Lanng:

“"I try to get in touch with a consultancy where I know some people with the right knowledge for my needs, or that I know the consultancy agency posses the knowledge I need. Which possesses a professional expertise which I can draw on to help me on a very definite issue’’. (Lanng)

And:

“"We simply need some people on the sideline, to make some timestudies, make some analysis on some tasks that make ends meet’’. (Lanng)

However, consultants are also used to create clarity and consistency in the organisation.

“"What we use consultants for, is that many things in our organization are only for insiders to understand and we do not make it explicit, where they can enter and say:”okay you sit and talk about this and that, how do you perceive that, if for example I was the sender and said, I was certain that the others had received and interpreted and has the same picture inside their head.”’ (Manager 4)

In this case it is foremost the outsider abilities which the client refer to. Namely the ability to provide the client with an objective outsider view on a certain problem.
11.3 What pitfalls do clients experience by using consultants?

The pitfalls by using consultants mentioned by the interviewed managers, is an important part of especially the critical literature within consulting. From the quotes below a picture of a very critical client is drawn:

“They do not care, they are here to earn money, they need the assignment, and they willingly accept the responsibility that naturally follows with it”. (Götzsche)

This quote shows that the consultant (in the eyes of the manager) do not care what he shall do for the company as long as he get paid. This is according to the client, one of the pitfalls by using a consultant because if he only wants to earn money he would not tell you if a project is wrong or useless because then there would not be anything in it for him. This is thereby for the manager to find out whether a task is usable or not. However, another pitfall when you are using a consultant is the fact that if he is a specialist on the field and you are not, he can easily be positioned like a “guru”. This is illustrated in the following quote by Lanng who says:

“As they always challenge the conservative organizations believe in “we know the best” it gets ambiguous. Cause we always become impressed by a consultant. If the consultant is skillfull and is not bringing a standard package of ideas, we always become impressed. What is the problem in this case, it to estimate the “what’s in it for me” in relation to the plan I have already made”. (Lanng)

This quote is much in line with the critical model on consulting, as it suggests that the client is being lured by the consultant and becomes impressed by what he does. He always has to distinguish between the “what is in it for him” and what is in it for the consultant. However, the below manager also shows that this is something he is careful about:

“They always have their own agenda, it is how they earn their money. They need to have a month salary out of it. And most of them are good salesmen. Well it is...it is what they live to do”. (Damgaard)

And:
…”but this (Six Sigma) also demand that if something like this going to be implemented, and you need help for this, then it is important that these people understand the task they are given. In case they do not do that and they are blinded by their own, then it is not the need of the company they fulfil but their own need”… (Götzsche)

The quote above illustrates one of the great concerns to clients, namely whose interest they act in. Especially concerning ethics, are they really acting in the role as great Samaritans or is it only their own interest they pursue?

The next quote also illustrates one concern which the client expressed, namely that they do not feel the consultants are worth the money. It originates from stories where client managers hear about projects, where they do not value the outcome. They therefore become distrustful towards the consultant, which is why the manager below mention an incidence where clients find out that the presence of consultants in their organisation did not make a difference.

“Well, during good times, where the companies earn a lot, this is also where consultants are most busy, however when crisis arises like now, they are also the first to lose their job. However, this is also a situation where many (clients) become surprised as they find that nothing is different now when the consultant has left. This is where many client become aware of the fact that they might pay for something which they do not get”. (Damgaard)

11.4 How are they affected in their role as managers?

In this section it is analysed how the interviewed managers sometimes are affected in their role as managers. It therefore gives a picture of how the manager perceived his own role in relation to a consultant. However as illustrated in the quote below, this a something which the consultant should avoid and generally illustrates the importance of trust in the relationship.

“What distinguishes the consultant from the manager in this case, is the case where the consultant is not chosen by the manager, but contrary one that is assigned to you, then you can decide to put him on a sidetrack. If you want to it can become a political weapon. I was not the one who chose this consultant, I do not like the changes, therefore I decide to put him of tracks. By making him fail deliberately”. (Götzsche)
11.5 How are consultants managed and how should they be according to the client?

"What becomes a longwithstanding relationship is that we return to and say what kind of challenge is it that we have, and then in precise terms ask them (consultants) to formulate what they might find interest in doing to the problem”. (Lanng)

The above quote illustrates a client who believes that consultants need to be pushed to invent new projects. They become aware of problems to a larger degree than him as a manager. In some way it can argued that the incentives and drive to look at problems is different to consultants, which he uses to his advantage. The manager generally uses consultants to cover up for lack of skills in his own organisation and in his role as manager he expressed a concern to make that gap as small as possible. However consultants could also be used to his advantage as they had to work really hard in order to reach their deadlines.

These deadlines had to be met in order for the consultants to get their fee, and according to the manager this was not something which he could not make his own employees pursue, as they did not have the same at stake. Their incentives were different and is illustrated below by Lanng and Götzsche.

"This is what is so wonderful about consultants, they work their asses of, which you cannot make you normal employees do to the same degree. The consultants need to relate to the 15th or someday. That is their deadline.” (Lanng)

And:

"As the process is proceding, they need a personal competence which forces them to force more work out of the project. This is the reason why it is so motivating to have a upsite bonus – or a bonus which rewards them in case they deliver more...” (Lanng)

And:

"Well to this is only to say, that the selection of a consultant is highly dependent on the success. In case you need to point out consultants to solve some kind of assignment, then you need to focus one hundred percent on the social skills. Especially, if it is an assignment that has a human touch to it and affects you employees, the consultant is to be part of some kind
of organizational change and work with your employees. Make them understand these things. Then the social skills of the consultant becomes highly dependent on the success. In that case it is furthermore important that the manager decides who the consultant should be quite clearly” (Goetzsche)

12 The role of the consultant

In this section I will analyse upon the role of the consultant seen from the managers point of view. I will first look upon the different abilities the consultant has according to the client, and secondly I will analyse upon what trust in regards to the consultant means for the manager. Especially trust was seen by the client managers as crucial to a good relationship.

12.1 Abilities of the consultant according to the client

In this section it is analysed what abilities and skills the consultant has according to the client in order to analyse their perception of consultants as well as how they should be managed.

Educational sense

A skill which is valued by the client is the educational sense on which the consultant also was judged by. However, this skill was most valued in situations where new strategies should be implemented or in the implementation of Six Sigma. Social skills and being able to relate to the organisation which the consultant should work with is also important as illustrated below:

“So the social skills, being able to catch the culture and the nerve in the organisation they have to work with. That is very decisive the way I see it”. (Götzsche)

The role of the consultant varied much according to the nature of the assignment. A manager below describes his relationship with a Six Sigma consultant:

“So the consultant both had a coaching and supervising task and help as well as helping us put on these models and help us understand them. Cause we later have to take them over later. If the social skills were not present with the consultant, then neither I nor the group would have been capable of solving this. So the presence of social skills was quite decisive in the collaboration between me the consultant and the group”. (Goetzsche)
12.1.1 Challenging the client view

It also was important to the client managers that they did not hire a consultant who only followed their lead. Contrary they wanted a consultant who was able to challenge their own ideas. This was considered important to them and a part of being a consultant.

”... that is part of being a consultant, that is to say it is not coherent dear friend...And that is part of that discussion and dialogue that goes on in such a process. It both goes on between internal people in their group but also towards the consultant. He should be able to act as a sparring partner in this regard.” (Damgaard)

The outsider perspective which the consultant is considered to provide was also very important to the client manager,

“Of course it is an advantage that they know our business. All the things about sales, how and why knowledge about the market in general...Basic knowledge about our business it is quite important they know that. At least as a starting point”. (Damgaard)

The outsider perspective is also valued by the client in order to get inspiration in this case as the consultant is not familiar with the business. As the client expresses the fact that the consultant is not familiar with their business can become an advantage as well. This can be seen below in the quote by Damgaard:

”Sometimes we can become so fed up with our knowledge, that we think this is the way we have always done it, it cannot be done in other ways. Whereas consultants, who might come from another branch of business, can come up with some suggestions, some inputs which can put another angle to the project”. (Damgaard)

As well as having a person to play the devil’s advocate in order to challenge the client view. This is illustrated below. In this case both the consultant’s educational sense; his ability to play the devil’s advocate as well as his outsider abilities is used. Furthermore this Six Sigma consultant was not an expert, actually he did not knew anything as Götzsche mentioned.

*Sometimes, you cannot see the forest for the trees. In this case (Six Sigma) the case was about asking questions, being the devil’s advocate, if you decided to go in this direction, use that strategy, what scenario would you then end with.*
Another factor that is important according to the client by being the devil’s advocate is trust. It is important in trusting the consultant to ask the right questions as a devil’s advocate and as an objective partner.

12.2 Trust to the consultant
In order to make the collaboration work between the client manager and the consultant, trust was considered crucial to the managers. It was important that trust was in place, as the quote below shows that trust to the consultant arises as the consultant is not trying to follow his own agenda. Contrary as the consultant is not acting in an “I know all” role he becomes trusted by the client manager. In this situation the consultant acts like a helper and not in the role of a manager. It is in this case the balancing act between being a consultant and a manager, which make this relationship work. Empathy, instead of rejection, removes some barriers to the consultant, and therefore creates trust and mutual understanding.

"What makes me trust the consultant is that the consultant is not forcing something through. The consultant asks and help and supports me to make me recognize my business. He adds some views and some method which can help me analyze my business and measure what is good or bad about this business. In that way trust arises when a consultant enters and say what you do is idiocy and now you have to do it all differently. Any person will feel attacked by this”.

Trust is one of the most important factors to the clients. They have to be sure that they can trust the consultant on a both social and work-related level.
13 Discussion:

In this section I discuss my findings from the interviews and compare and elaborate on them to the current literature and theory previously mentioned in the thesis. As this thesis focuses on the role of the client in the relationship with a consultant this will naturally be the focus in the discussion as well.

The theory on client-consultant relationship each sets up different assumed roles for both client and consultants. Especially is the value of consultancy advice questioned and why the clients use consultancy advice.

Each of the perspectives has overlaps in their definition, they are not distinctive. It is therefore of no value to use each of the perspective distinctively in the analysis, but what should be sought after is a multiperspective approach. The client should be aware of the fact that many types of relationships can be appropriate and that the type changes according to the type of problem, but also sometimes during the collaboration process. This has also been pointed out by Nikolova (Nikolova 2007). Furthermore what complicates the picture is that some types of problems requires a deeper interaction between the client and consultant than others.

The recommendations by Nikolova that clients should acknowledge that there are different types of consulting, and that each assumes different roles to each part, seems to agree with what the managers told me in the interviews. Furthermore, they are aware of these different types of consulting and how each type determines their role as clients.

The reflective practitioner model was also evident in the description of Six Sigma as the consultant in this case acted as a reflective practitioner. His job was to make sure everyone in the organisation pursued the same goal, and was not given any advice other than coaching and supporting the client.

In this study each of the managers has expressed a certain understanding of what it requires of them as clients. A consultant, which they were careful of not being too dependent on, especially in cases where they knew they had a lack of skills and when confronted with a consultancy which offered a huge area of competences to its clients.
It can be assumed that the dependency to the consultant is avoided as the opposite might be seen as their failure to fulfil their management task. It might be seen as an attack to their personal integrity, as one the interviewed managers expressed.

Reasons to why consultants were hired depended on the type of assignment but each perspective in the current literature also mentions different reasons for this. From a critical perspective the reasons include according to Sturdy (Sturdy 1997) an impertinence to management. The managers feel insecure in their management role which fuels a need to hire consultants to help them overcome this insecurity. From an expert perspective however the reason why they hire consultants is due to a lack of skills and both consultant and client perceive the problem the same. Especially the reason why managers use consultants is related to how they also perceive consultants as well as the experience they have with them. It is therefore important to analyse the relationship using a multiperspective approach, where each of the perspectives are valid.

The relationship between the client and consultant is also determined by trust and courage from the client manager’s point of view. Especially courage as if he let the consultant run loose, how then will it affect his management ideas of running the company. The manager is then confronted with a dilemma, as he needs to decide how the recommendations from the consultants differ from his own perceptions and ideas to a solution.

Trust to the consultant was also mentioned by the interviewed managers as being crucial to a successful relationship. Both in terms of how they perceived the consultant personally and how they evaluated the knowledge he provided. Trust was especially important in cases where the consultant was used to develop and interfere with strategy and therefore needed time to adjust and act loosely in the organisation. Preferably the consultant needed to become part of the organisation itself and foremost be accepted by the employees affected by future strategies. But before the consultant could become a part of the company, the company had to hire him. In the following section I will discuss how important it is to find the right consultant to the job.

In the phase of hiring a consultant it was evident that the client did a lot of checking up upon him, as he in line with Clark’s argument on the nature of services, finds himself in a situation where it is hard to prove the quality of what he is actually buying. Despite the fact that the
client did a lot of checking up upon the consultant he still has to be aware of the fact that neither the role of the consultant nor the role of himself as a client remains the same during their whole relationship. Consequently, the roles are not static but evolve during their relationship. It is however, the frame within the relationship exists, that becomes important when analysing the client role. This frame consists of the expectations they each have, the reason why the consultant is hired, the type of task that needs to be solved and why.

From the analysis it can be argued that the oldest of the perspectives to consultancy, expert consultancy in the literature is evident. For example, how the client in my analysis perceived the consultants and how they perceived their relationship was in line with the expert model, where there is a clear definition of the assignment. An assignment, which the client manager had a clear expectation about as well as a solution to. However, it should be mentioned that this might have to do with the fact that the clients I interviewed all spoke about their experience with consultants in a broad perspective. They had all experienced many types of consultants.

The client does a lot of checking up upon the consultant, but is still aware that it is necessary to leave room for the consultant as well. The consultants need to be left alone in order for the consultant to initiate change or a new strategy in the organisation.

However as the definition of roles is from a dominating consultant perspectives, the frames of the relationship is defined by the consultant as well as the thereof assumed role for the client, one can argue whether the client is in the hands of consultant. This presupposes naturally that the client follows the expected role as assumed by the consultant. If this is the case then the consultant is the puppeteer and the client the puppet. In the analysis however there was no sign of a client who would let themselves control by a consultant. There was a clear distinction between the two roles.

Existing literature within the critical literature, draws an image of managerial anxiety, which results in a persistent use of consultants. However, during my analysis I saw no sign of anxious manager. Contrary, it was very important to them to stay on top of things and be in control. Therefore the consultant was kept in a short leash. Another discussion is whether the value of consulting can be taken for granted. Which each of the perspectives assume differently. Authors writing from an OD point of view for example focuses on how
consultants should act as professional helpers, and always in the best interest of the client. Whereas the authors from the critical mainly criticises this view and argues that the value as well as their intentions is not always beneficial for the client.

14 Conclusion:

This thesis began with the question: “How do clients perceive their own role in the client-consultant relationship and how do they perceive the consultant?”, which through the analysis should have become clearer to the reader. My frame of reference uses a hermeneutic perspective in order to understand how client and consultant interact. Therefore, four managers were interviewed and analyzed both in accordance to common themes, but also in accordance to the current literature.

The analysis draws a picture of a client, who is utmost active, especially in the selection of consultants and during their interaction, which is due to consultancy fee he pays. It shows a role of a client, who tries to get the most out of the situation to his own advance. He is after all, the one who spends the money and therefore has something at stake.

A common mentioned fact by the client is the struggle to check up on the quality of the service they are buying. In this regard, the consultants’ experience and reputation are also considered as important issues. As soon as the consultant is hired the client is still active in order to check up on the consultant, even though this depends on the nature of the assignment. In cases where a new strategy is implemented or some form of change initiated, then the client is well aware that the consultant needs to adjust to the organisation first.

An important role for the client before the final collaboration is decided, is to tell the consultant about his view and definition of the problem which needs to be solved. In this phase of the process the client also reflects on the type of consultant that seems the most appropriate of the solution of the problem as well as what it demands of him as a manager.

During the relationship, the client role changes to that of checking up on the consultant. However, this depends on the type of problem for which the consultant is hired to solve. In some cases, just some checkmarks is set in order to follow up on the status, to other cases of implementing strategies, where an active discussion with the consultant is needed.
Concerning how the client manager perceived the consultant, then each of the managers had a clear understanding of the consultant as a salesperson, and they were all aware of the fact that the consultant’s presence demanded something from them. The interviewed managers also expressed that it was necessary to define the goals of the organization to the consultant, so that he would not start on new projects in the organization. If a project did not end well, the managers often blamed themselves, as they had not been specific and defined a clear goal, nor had they defined their expectations to the consultant and his role. The client managers also perceived consultants who were capable of presenting a solution that was not pre-packaged more positive.

As previously mentioned, then each of the four perspectives to the relationship each has a say as it depends on the type of problem for which the consultant is hired. However the perspectives where the client was considered a passive part was not evident in this study.

14.1 Suggestions for further research
The sample is relatively small, and consists of large companies and their CEO’s. A study on how they create their relationship could be carried out by visiting a case company in situ. Furthermore, the use of consultants might be different in the countries in Europe. Their relationship with the consultant is different, both what concerns the role of the client and the role of the consultant. How this affects the relationship, might be interesting for future studies.
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